

Message Text

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TAGS: PINT, SP

SUBJ: THE SUCCESSION -- A PRAGMATIC VIEW FROM REGIME CENTER

REF: MADRID 7488

SUMMARY: ADOLFO SUAREZ, THE LEADER OF THE LARGEST OF THE POLITICAL ASSOCIATIONS REPRESENTING THE HEARTLAND OF THE REGIME, TOOK A GENERALLY PRAGMATIC VIEW OF WHAT OUGHT TO BE, IN HIS JUDGMENT, A CONTROLLED EVOLUTIONARY PROCESS UNDER JUAN CARLOS. EVEN IF FRANCO HUNG ON A WHILE LONGER, SPAIN COULD NOT AFFORD TO WAIT AND A TRANSFER OF POWERS WAS NECESSARY. HE FELT THAT, IN A TIME OF TRANSITION, IT WOULD BE BEST TO RETAIN ARIAS, (SINCE WOULD-BE PRIME MINISTERS ALL HAD DISABILITIES) ALTHOUGH A BROADENED CABINET WOULD BE IN ORDER. SO LONG AS THE EVOLUTION DID NOT GET OUT OF HAND, THE MILITARY WOULD SUPPORT THE PROCESS. BUT EVOLUTION OTWARD A FREE PLAY OF POLITICAL FORCES WOULD HAVE TO BE ACCOMPLISHED THROUGH ESTABLISHED CONSTITUTIONAL PROCESSES, OR RISK SERIOUS DESTABILIZATION. END SUMMARY.

1. EMBOFF SPOKE YESTERDAY WITH ADOLFO SUAREZ, THE YOUNG (43) AND DYNAMIC LEADER OF THE UNDP, THE LARGEST OF THE NASCENT POLITICAL ASSOCIATIONS IN SPAIN. ORIGINALLY LED BY SOLIS, THE UNDP REPRESENTS THE HEARTLAND -- BUT NOT BY ANY MEANS THE "BUNKER" OF THE REGIME. AT WRITING, ALONG WITH THE SMALLER, CONFIDENTIAL

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RIGHT WING OF THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS, IT IS THE ONLY ASSOCIAT-

ION WHICH CAN BE TAKEN PARTICULARLY SERIOUSLY.

2. SUAREZ SAID THAT FRANCO'S BATTLING BACK TIME AND AGAIN SHOWED HIS REMARKABLE VITALITY, BUT AS THE RULER OF SPAIN, FRANCO WAS FINISHED. HE ASSUMED FRANCO COULD NOT LAST MUCH LONGER, ALTHOUGH ONE OF THE PHYSICIANS ATTENDING HAD TOLD HIM THAT FRANCO'S CAPACITY FOR RECOVERY HAD DUMFOUNDED HIM. IF BY SOME MIRACLE HE WERE TO SURVIVE FOR A WHILE AS AN INVALID, THEN IT WOULD BE NECESSARY FOR HIM TO SIGN OFF THE POWERS TO JUAN CARLOS. THE NATION COULD AFFORD TO WAIT A FEW DAYS MORE, BUT NOT INDEFINITELY.

3. SUAREZ HIMSELF PREFERRED THAT ARIAS STAY ON UNTIL, SAY, THE CORTES ELECTIONS SCHEDULED FOR MARCH. ARIAS' DISABILITIES WERE NO WORSE THAN THOSE OF THE OTHERS MENTIONED. RETENTION OF ARIAS WOULD BE CLEARLY SEEN AS A TRANSITION MEASURE, AND HIS GOVERNMENT -- WHICH WOULD HAVE TO INCLUDE A BROADENED BASE OF NEW CABINET MINISTERS -- WOULD NOT BE SEEN AS ONE THAT WAS JOCKEYING FOR PERMANENT POWER, SOMETHING THAT WOULD BE VERY DANGEROUS TO JUAN CARLOS AND THE SUCCESS OF POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT.

4. IN CONTRAST, FRAGA WOULD BE A DISASTER AS PRIME MINISTER BECAUSE HE IS SO CORDIALLY DISTRUSTED, ALTHOUGH HE SHOULD BE IN A BROADENED CABINET. IF NOT ARIAS, RODRIGUEZ DE VALCARCEL, BECAUSE OF HIS POSITION OF POWER AS HEAD OF THE 17 MAN COUNCIL OF THE REALM WHICH RECOMMENDS THE THREE CANDIDATES FROM WHICH THE PRINCE MUST CHOOSE, WOULD BE A STRONG CANDIDATE. BUT RODRIGUEZ DE VALCARCEL HAS OBVIOUS LONG-TERM AMBITIONS AND SYMBOLIZES, AT HOME AND ABROAD, FAR TOO MUCH THE ANCIENT REGIME. HE THOUGHT FORMER LABOR MINISTER LICINIO DE LA FUENTE -- CHARACTERIZED BY ANOTHER SOURCE AS SOMEONE WHO HAS NOT BURNED HIS BRIDGES WITH ANYONE, MIGHT BE A DARK HORSE. RUNNING DOWN THE LIST, SUAREZ DISMISSED TWO OTHER NAMES THAT HAVE RECENTLY SURFACED, FERNANDEZ DE MIRANDA (REF) AND THE FORMER TECHNOCRAT FINANCE MINISTER BARRERA DE IRIMO AS QUITE UNLIKELY. IN SUM, THE PRINCE, WHO WILL NOT HAVE FRANCO'S CLOUT, WOULD BE UNWISE TO TRY TO FORCE A PERSONAL CHOICE UPON THE VERY CONSERVATIVE COUNCIL OF THE REALM. SINCE THERE IS NO CONSENSUS, BEST STICK WITH ARIAS FOR THE TRANSITION.

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5. THE MILITARY WANTED TO STAY OUT OF DIRECT POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT AND WOULD SUPPORT AN EVOLUTIONARY TRANSITION. IF THINGS WENT TOO FAST, THE OLDER LEADERSHIP MIGHT BE INCLINED TO ACT, SOMETHING THAT WOULD BE DANGEROUS SINCE THE GENERALS DO NOT REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF THE YOUNGER OFFICERS. THE APOLITICAL TRADITION, ONCE BROKEN, MIGHT BE HARD TO RE-ESTABLISH.

6. DOWN THE PIKE, THE REAL ISSUE LAY IN HOW TO MANAGE A TRANSITION TO A PLURALIST SYSTEM. THE IDEA THAT THE SOCIALISTS (MEANING THE PSOE AND FELIPE GONZALEZ) MIGHT PARTICIPATE IN A TRANSITION GOVERNMENT WAS STUPID. FORTUNATELY THE PSOE WAS NOT ADVANCING THIS IDEA AND WAS PREPARED TO GIVE JUAN CARLOS A CHANCE. HE DID NOT THINK THE SOCIALISTS WERE AS STRONG AS THEY THOUGHT. NONETHELESS, IF THINGS WENT WELL, THEY WOULD EVENTUALLY HAVE A CHANCE TO PROVE THEIR ELECTORAL STRENGTH. IN RESPECT OF THE POLITICAL PROCESS, IT WAS ESSENTIAL TO MAKE REFORMS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CONSTITUTION. A LATIN AMERICAN STYLE CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM IN WHICH EVERYTHING WAS OVERTURNED WOULD ONLY PROVE ONCE AGAIN THAT THE BEST IS THE ENEMY OF THE GOOD, AND WOULD LEAD TO CHAOS. JUAN CARLOS WOULD BE SWORN IN TO UPHOLD THE CONSTITUTION AND COULD NOT AFFORD TO BREAK WITH IT. THE FUNDAMENTAL LAWS PROVIDED FOR MECHANISMS OF AMENDMENT WHICH COULD BE USED TO MAKE THE CHANGES NECESSARY TO OPEN UP THE PROCESS.

7. THE REAL DECISION LAY BETWEEN PROCEEDING TO DEMOCRATIZE THE CORPORATE SYSTEM OF REPRESENTATION NOW ESTABLISHED, IN WHICH VARIOUS SECTORS ARE REPRESENTED, OR MAKING A BREAK TO A STRAIGHT ELECTORAL SYSTEM, AS EMBODIED IN THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF LIBERAL DEMOCRACY IN WESTERN EUROPE. HE ASSUMED THE CHOICE WOULD GO TO THE FORMER AND THAT THE CORPORATE SET-UP WOULD BE FOLLOWED, WITH SOME SIGNIFICANT ADJUSTMENTS TO OPEN UP THE POLITICAL PROCESS.

8. SUAREZ SAID THAT MOST OF THE FIGURES OF THE ANCIENT REGIME LIVED IN GLASS HOUSES AND THAT ONCE THEIR CAREERS WERE SUBJECT TO SCRUTINY IN A MUCH FREER PRESS, THE POLITICAL HISTORY OF MANY OF THEM WOULD NOT STAND CLOSE EXAMINATION. AT THE SAME TIME, SPANIARDS WERE READY FOR BUT NOT USED TO

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THE FREE PLAY OF POLITICAL FORCES. THUS, THE EVOLUTION HAD TO BE CONTROLLED IN ORDER TO GIVE TIME FOR THE PUBLIC TO BEGIN TO THINK OUT ITS INTERESTS. HE WAS SURE THE PUBLIC OF SPAIN WAS BASICALLY CONSERVATIVE AND WOULD AT LEAST INITIALLY OPT FOR A CONSERVATIVE REGIME UNDER THE MONARCHY IF THE EVOLUTION WERE PROPERLY CONDUCTED. HE THOUGHT THAT THE LAYING OF LONG-RANGE PLANS BY THE POLITICIANS WAS A FUTILE EXERCISE AND THAT EVENTS RATHER THAN PROGRAMMATIC THEORIES WOULD HAVE TO GOVERN POLITICAL APPROACHES IN THE NEXT FEW MONTHS.

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